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OSD FOR WINTERNITZ

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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT--DECEMBER 12, 2007

1. (SBU) COALITION NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE, FINAL ELECTION RESULTS DUE DEC. 13:

Due to minor irregularities in the first round on November 25, a handful of polling stations around Croatia had to re-run their vote on December 9. The number of voters was too small to have any impact on final results. The final results are now expected late on December 13. President Mesic is therefore likely to decide on December 14 or 15 to whom he will give a mandate to try and form a government, and it is looking increasingly clear that the mandate will first be given to HDZ leader and current PM Ivo Sanader. HDZ negotiations with the key coalition partners of the HSS and HSLs continued all of this week. Both press and private reports indicate that the HDZ has decided to take its time and pursue detailed negotiations over the terms of a coalition government agreement. Ministerial level negotiators on December 12 reported that they had reached agreement on 25 out of 30 issues. At least some of the remaining issues, including how to handle HSS calls for a referendum on NATO membership and for full implementation of the protected fishing zone in the Adriatic, will only be settled at a final set of negotiations by Sanader with HSS President Josip Friscic and HSLs President Djurdja Adlesic. A final agreement on a coalition therefore appears likely next week. (RHoltzapple)

2. (U) Embassy Sponsors DVC in Observation of World Aids Day: Post sponsored a digital video conference on December 6 on HIV/AIDS awareness for student audiences in Zagreb and Zadar.

The DVC featured Kevin Johnson, who is 24 years old, HIV positive, and a full-time student working as a youth outreach specialist with the AIDS partnership of Michigan. The conference reached 16 students in Zagreb preparing for careers as nurses and medical technicians and approximately 50 secondary school students from two schools in traditionally conservative Zadar. Emphasizing the themes of prevention and testing, Johnson made an impact on our young audience by openly answering many difficult questions. Attended by two journalists, the DVC received favorable coverage from a local Zadar daily. The conference was effective public diplomacy because the speaker communicated with the audience on a human level, increasing awareness of the need for HIV/AIDS prevention and testing as well as providing a social perspective on living with the disease. (KWetzel)

3. (U) Retired FSO Given Award as Part of Human Right's Day Celebrations:

On the occasion of Human Right's Day, December 10th, the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights presented awards to three "defenders of human rights". The "Miko Tripalo" award for the protection and promotion of human rights was

presented to Ambassador Robert W. (Todd) Becker, a retired FSO and for the last seven years the Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission in Croatia. The Josko Kulusic award went to the Croatian Television program for ethnic minorities "Prizma". Peter Kuzmic, a prominent evangelical scholar, was also awarded for his work in the promotion of inter-religious dialogue. In addition, GOC officials, UNHCR, OSCE, Croatian Red Cross, and numerous Croatian NGOs celebrated the December 10th Human Rights Day through a series of concerts, ceremonies, and public outreach efforts on Zagreb's main square. (DFisk)

14. (U) Croatsians Perceive Judiciary and Health Care as Most Corrupt:

On December 6, Transparency International (TI) released its Global Corruption Barometer 2007, a public opinion survey gauging ordinary Croatsians' perceptions of corruption. As in 2005 and 2006, Croatsians perceive the judiciary as the most corrupt (4.3 on a scale of 5), followed by medical services (4.2), businesses (4.0), political parties (4.0), and parliament (3.9). Only 8% of 2007 Croatian survey respondents reported having paid a bribe for services, while the overall rate for Southeast Europe was 12%. About a quarter (28%) of respondents think corruption will decrease in the next three years, while 40% expect an increase. About 60% said the government's efforts to fight corruption are ineffective. In his statement at the TI Croatia event to release the Barometer, Croatian President Stepan Mesic also said he was not satisfied with the past work of the government on countering corruption. (SLitke)

15. (U) FAA Briefs Croatian Civil Aviation Authority:
Post hosted an FAA briefing on the International Aviation Safety Assessments (IASA) process via
DVC on December 10 for the Croatian Civil Aviation Authority

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and Foreign Ministry. The briefing familiarized the Croatsians with the IASA process, a necessary precursor to approval of a pending codeshare agreement between United Airlines and Croatia Airlines. A formal assessment of Croatia,s compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization safety standards will be made by an FAA team expected to visit Zagreb in the second half of January, 2008. (NBerliner)

16. (U) Hanukkah Celebrated on Zagreb's Main Square:
Zagreb Mayor Milan Bandic and Israeli Ambassador to Croatia, Shmuel Meirom, marked the celebration of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, by lighting candles on the capital's central Ban Jelacic Square. In a culminating ceremony on December 10th, religious leaders, politicians, diplomatic representatives, and the general public, attended an evening ceremony presided over by Tel Aviv head rabbi Ysraela Meir Lau. In addition to lighting ceremonies on the main square, individual Jewish community celebrations occurred throughout the eight-day holiday. (DFisk)

17. (U) Weighing A Regional Warehouse:
Embassy Zagreb's Management Team just ran a competition to model a regional warehouse to support Zagreb, Ljublijana, Sarajevo and Belgrade. Two interdisciplinary teams, one looking at complete outsourcing and the other at providing the service in-house, probed and crunched the staffing, customs, NEPA, transportation and other issues (including cost). They presented their findings to the other team and a panel of "judges" a month later. The analysis of both teams concluded that a drastic loss in service standards, as well as difficulties both in property accountability and in clearing customs multiple times outweighed the cost savings. Instead, Zagreb is moving forward with our consolidation plan to eliminate a costly leased warehouse upon the departure of AID. (TFavret)
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